

**Terrestrial Core Team Meeting**  
**Connecticut River Pilot Core Team Meeting in**  
**Hadley, Massachusetts**

**August 28, 2014, 1:00 to 2:00 p.m.**

We began the meeting by reviewing the decision points related to core areas outlined by Kevin McGarigal during his presentation.

Side note: In early descriptions of the design, both core areas and buffers were to be created. However, as the methodology of the core areas has evolved to its current form, the algorithmic approach, in which core areas are grown out from a seed, has to a large extent reduced the need for buffers as they were originally conceived. In one sense, the “seed” is the true core, with the expansion from the seed the buffer. Of course, our design will not label these in this way. However, the current plan is to proceed with the core areas created by the algorithm without adding additional buffers.

Weighted vs. unweighted selection index

**Mitch:** I would like to review this again. I’m interested in seeing what macrogroups are weighted and by how much.

**Bill Labich:** I think we need to fish or cut bait.

The issue was briefly discussed, and in general there is consensus to keep our previous decision about macrogroup weighting. Mitch was okay with this.

**Scott:** Perhaps we should consider increasing weight for groups that are not as well-represented as we hoped.

**Bill Jenkins:** When the species data is brought in, will that potentially also coincide with some of the rare communities, and bring them in, in a sense?

CTR, HUC8, or Hybrid selection index

There was a lot of discussion on this topic with no clear consensus. Some felt that scaling by the CTR watershed was arbitrary and not useful, but that scaling by HUC8 would be accessible and useful to managers, and would result in a more well-distributed network that would better connect to the surrounding region. Others pointed out that the goal is to produce a regional conservation design, not several conservation designs for HUC8s. We will need to keep discussing this, and get more information on why we might choose the averaged version that Kevin presented as the “hybrid” approach.

Create core areas with or without rare communities

**Eric Sorenson:** Can we figure out which rare communities are in an area of high integrity and keep those, and let **go** the ones in poor areas?

**Kevin:** We could ensure that patches in bad landscape context would get left out.

Those in the room seemed generally in agreement with this idea. Kevin pointed out that this would lead to additional new decisions needing to be made. For instance, how many (core areas, or area) would be discarded? Discussions on this came around to a consensus that some sort of natural break given the data made the most sense, rather than choosing an arbitrary cutoff (e.g. 50%). This was the first time the team had learned about the issue of including rare communities in the core area design pre-connectivity, so some reflection on the implications of either alternative is needed.

#### What % of the landscape should be included in cores?

Looking at the image on slide 13 led some to advocate for the 30% threshold, so as to create larger core areas, because it merges nearby core areas. However, Kevin pointed out that for every additional percent added to the core areas, some larger core areas will merge – it just depends on where within the watershed you look. Because each of the options will still result in merged core areas and nearby core areas that are not merged, that doesn't really work as a criterion for selecting a % threshold. Kevin looked into how much of the proposed core areas were already protected in some way – owned by a conservation organization, federal agency, or under an easement – and the result was that 50% of the core areas under the 25% -of-landscape-in-cores approach is already conserved. Because additional land outside the core areas is conserved, if the full 25% were conserved, the total land conserved in the watershed would be 37.5%.

We didn't have a real consensus on which of the 3 options was best, but there were not any strong disagreements, either.

#### Fewer/larger or more/smaller cores

This simple dichotomy actually combines several sub-decisions to be made. We spent most of the time discussing this issue getting a clearer understanding of Kevin's strategy in creating the two options.

First, we need to choose the minimum core size. Two options were presented: 4.5 acres or 9 acres. This minimum would be enforced after the seeds are created, but before they are expanded. The final core areas will always be much larger than these minima. Other minimum sizes are fine; the team needs to settle on one.

Second, we need to choose the initial proportion of the selection index to be used to create the core area 'seeds.' In the scenarios presented, the top 5% based on the selection index was used to seed the 'fewer/larger' options, and the top 10% was used to seed the more/smaller option.

It was not clear from the presentation whether the first decision or the second had more effect on the area from each macrogroup that wound up in a core area. Kevin said that in general, using the fewer/larger approach would result in less representation from small-scale macrogroups, such as wetlands, and more representation from the general matrix present on the landscape, in our case Northern Hardwood & Conifer.

Opinions were expressed supporting both options. Kevin provided additional detail on the fewer/larger option, which would consist of 577 separate core areas ranging in size from 130 to 87000+ acres. The team did not reach consensus on this subject, but are now in a position to consider it more fully. There was a lot of support for a 10% slice if it would better represent rare systems, but still uncertainty as to whether those systems would be included in the species-based approach and what that might imply for making this decision for the ecosystem-based cores.

### Species Weighting

Randy passed out a revised species weighting matrix and a form to describe the basis for weighting, such as the magnitude and extent of threats to species. Because we discussed each of the 5 ecosystem design decision points at length, we did not have a lot of time to collaboratively fill out Randy's updated species weighting matrix. Instead, Randy explained it and asked team members to fill out the sheet to the best of their ability and return it by the end of the first week of September. Several team members expressed their appreciation for the great deal of work Randy has put into updating and modifying this matrix.